

THE MONTCLAIR BIRD CLUB

QUIZ 158

October 16, 2022

How did the motmot get its tail?



Trinidad Motmot

Link to ponder: Avian degrees of [separation](#).

THE ANSWER IS ON THE NEXT PAGE

Until quite recently, the mantra was that motmots deliberately groomed their tails to create the racquets at the end of the tail. This would be accomplished with routine preening. Alas, the motmots probably don't have the fashion sense we've attributed to them.

From Cornell: Research revealed that the shape is actually created by motmots during routine preening!

In several species of motmots, the barbs near the ends of the two longest (central) tail feathers are weak and fall off due to abrasion with substrates, or fall off during preening, leaving a length of bare shaft, thus creating the racket shape of the tail. **It was however wrongly believed in the past that the motmot shaped its tail by plucking part of the feather web to leave the racket.** This was based on inaccurate reports made by [Charles William Beebe](#). It has since been shown that these barbs are weakly attached and fall off due to abrasion with substrates and during routine preening.

There are however also several species where the tail is "normal", these being the tody motmot, blue-throated motmot, rufous-capped motmot, and the Amazonian populations of the rufous and broad-billed motmots.



Turquoise-browed Motmot

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Southwest Wings

